THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF GUATEMALA

The Church of England

The oldest proof of an Anglican Church in the Republic of Guatemala is a Bible still in our possession inscribed as follows:

> "E. C. Stone, presented by his father, Janry. 1, 1867, Christ Church, Guatemala."

Thus we know that there has been an Anglican Church in this country for over a hundred years, ministering to the small community of British and American churchmen living in Guatemala City. As indicated in the inscription above, the Anglican Parish of Guatemala was known as "Christ Church," and was in charge of a Church of England clergyman who was also a member of the staff of the British Legation.

When the group was left priestless towards the end of World War II, the Bishop of British Honduras made occasional visits to the city or sent diocesan clergymen, but with no regularity. There was no definite place of worship, and services were held by laymen in the British Legation or in private homes. The Rev. Archdeacon Cooper very faithfully held Communion services every month at his home in Antigua, where he was retired.

In 1955, the British Minister graciously offered the Church a room on its premises, which was suitably furnished as a chapel. At that time the name of the parish was changed to "St. George's."

Transition from the Church of England to the Episcopal Church

In 1957, an agreement was reached by the Anglican Church of the West Indies and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., whereby Guatemala was transferred to the Missionary District of Central America and the episcopal oversight of Bishop R. Heber Gooden, then Bishop of Panama and the Canal Zone.

Soon after, David E. Richards was elected bishop of the new district, with headquarters in San José, Costa Rica, and the Rev. Charles F. Schulhafer took charge of the parish. It was now imperative that a building be found, for the congregation had outgrown the room at the Legation, and we had accepted their kind hospitality too long. An almost perfect house was rented in Zone 9.

With a church building uppermost in the minds of all, everyone was delighted when it was possible to purchase the land then occupied by the American School, with funds made available by the National Church. The original plan to sell part of this land and build with the proceeds on the rest has never been realized, due partly to a change in the strategy of the Church in

Guatemala. As mission came to be more and more a priority, it became obvious that this land, situated in an upper-class residential area, was too far removed and inaccessible for members who relied on the public bus service for transportation.

Early Efforts at Evangelism in Spanish

Shortly after this purchase the Rev. Adrián Cáceres was sent by Bishop Richards to work with the Guatemalans. He soon had an interested group of active university students who held retreats ("encounters") in the Zone 9 house. While this property had been perfect for the English-speaking congregation, it was not large enough for the new activities, so there was another move to a larger house in Zona 10. In time this house was also found wanting, and while the English services continued there, another house was rented in Zone 1 for the Spanish congregation and as a study and recreation center. The parish was then appropriately named"Santiago Apóstol" or "St. James'" for the patron saint of Guatemala.

When the two houses proved to be too expensive, the one in Zone 10 was given up, and the English congregation moved to Zone 1. Together again in one locale, after much thought and prayer, the two previously separate and distinct missions, one English and the other Spanish, voted to unite into one congregation with one vestry and one budget. Services continued at different hours in the respective languages, but funds were used for the benefit of one parish, and the vestry functioned as one administrative body. At this time the English-speaking group voted to also change its name from St. George's to St. James' as it was already known in Spanish.

In the past ten years Santiago/St. James' has been served by a multitude of priests, some briefly, some for longer periods. More recently, Daniel González and David Bergesen together combined a parish ministry with teaching duties in the diocesan seminary from 1971 to 1973, the former in Santiago and the latter in St. James'. The present vicar of both congregations is Eduardo Monzón, the Guatemalan Church's first native-born ordained priest, with the bishop, Anselmo Carral, acting as rector. A young Guatemalan deacon, Leonel Blanco, serves as Fr. Monzón's assistant in the Spanish work.

After nearly six years of trying to settle the legal claim to the present property, the end seems to be in sight. As soon as this is a reality, the plan is to build a new church for Santiago/St. James' on the site adjacent to the present building, which would be conserved for Sunday School and parish activities.

The Development of an Urban Ministry

From the outset the major emphasis of the ministry to nationals in Guatemala City was the formation of a congregation of adult members from the middle and professional classes and the organization of a group of university students. The building in Zone 1 continued to be used as a chapel for both congregations and central parish offices until 1969, when a prime piece of property on Avenida Castellana in Zone 8 was purchased with a United Thank Offering grant.

In October of that year, parish offices and worship services were moved to this location, where they still are today. This old house had been closed by government order for 12 years for tax delinquency, so the job of cleaning and rehabilitating it was a mammoth one; roof and ceiling were replaced throughout, all with the Church "in residence." In 1970, diocesan offices were also moved to this property, after using rented facilities for over two years.

In 1963, a second mission in Spanish, "San Juan del Trébol," (St. John of the Trébol) was opened in a rented building in Zone 12. It was composed of an active nucleus of former members of Santiago and young people. In 1965, a children's clinic was established on the premises of the chapel, and voluntary services of doctors and nurses were made available. The clinic offered consultation, immunization, and instruction to mothers in child care. Late in 1965, a piece of property was purchased in Zone 8, quite close to the rented property in Zone 12, for the use of this mission, and all activities were transferred there. However, with the opening of similar clinics in the area, as well as other Protestant evangelical churches, as the city grew to the south, it became obvious that these operations were ineffective and costly, and the mission was closed in October 1969.

In 1972, the mission now known as "San Juan Bautista" (St. John the Baptist) was reopened by the Rev. Efraín Huerta, in another rented building in Zone 12, in more or less the same area where the mission was originally established in 1963. The work continued there until early 1975, when the mission and most of its followers moved to Zone 1, where it is hoped to reach out to a whole new group of people.

Before the end of 1965 a third mission, "Espíritu Santo" (Holy Spirit) had been started, using a rented house in the northern sector of the city. Again, several families from the congregation of Santiago provided the base for this new endeavor. Fr. Cáceres inaugurated the mission in October 1965 and directed the work until Fr. Kennedy arrived in September 1966 from Mariscos. When the latter left a year later for advanced studies in Mexico, the mission had to be closed and was not reopened until April 1970 when, shortly after his ordination to the diaconate, Miguel Palacios was sent there. He served in this position until the end of 1974, when Espíritu Santo became the responsibility of one of the young Guatemalan clergy, the Rev. Rubén Rodríguez, who is awakening new enthusiasm in this sector of the city. He is also in charge of an offshoot of this mission, known as the mission of "Cristo Rey" (Christ the King), in the Barrio San Antonio in Zone 6, comprised mainly of a large group of active young people.

In early 1970, another new mission, "San Pedro y San Pablo" (St. Peter and St. Paul), was started in one of the outlying areas of the city in Zone 19, by the Rev. Efraín Huerta. The first services were held in homes, and after a year a church building was begun and inaugurated in late 1971. In January 1974 one of the new Guatemalan priests was given the responsibility of this organized mission, and in the past year there has been considerable expansion of the work there, resulting in a growth to almost double the original number. Several enthusiastic groups are functioning: Churchwomen, Youth Group, choir, Sunday School (one of the characteristics of this mission is the participation

of children, who account for about half the normal Sunday attendance), and a vacation school. In January 1975, another new venture was undertaken with the inauguration of a primary school "Thomas Cranmer," with kindergarten, pre-school, and the first three years of elementary. The school has been enthusiastically accepted by the people of the neighborhood, and the plan is to add additional grades as necessary until the full six years of primary education are covered.

The Work Among British West Indians

St. Michael's and All Angels - Bananera

The congregation of St. Michael's and All Angels in Bananera had its origins in the United Fruit Company farm town of Virginia in the year 1907. When, in 1928, the Company moved its headquarters to Bananera, most of the congregation moved with it, and the original church building was also transferred there. Baptismal records indicate that the first minister served the congregation in Virginia and other nearby towns from 1907 to 1910. One of the priests of that era, Fr. Frank Kelly, whose tenure dates off and on from 1912 to 1935, worked at the same time as superintendent of United Fruit's hotels in Puerto Barrios, Quiriguá, Virginia, and later Bananera.

By a strange twist of fate, a new attempt at mission is being undertaken in what remains of the little town of Virginia, with a small nucleus of descendents of the original church members from United Fruit days. A donation has been made by an interested churchman from the United States, and a small church is being built on a site donated by the local authorities, the new mission to be known as St. Timothy's at the request of the donor. After 47 years, the Episcopal (Anglican) Church has returned to Virginia.

The congregation of St. Michael's was primarily an English-speaking group, composed largely of British West Indians employed by the United Fruit Company. This little congregation of some 20 communicants was all that remained of a once large complex of Anglican missions in the major company towns during the Company's "golden era" in Guatemala. By 1957 this group had been without a priest in residence for 22 years. At the time, services were being led by lay readers who, in turn, were supported by an occasional visit from the priest in Guatemala City.

A year and a half after his first visit, Bishop Richards was able to secure a second priest for Guatemala. In 1960, the Rev. Robert M. Demery arrived in Bananera and took up duties as the first resident Episcopal priest since 1935. The mission was given momentary impetus by his presence and guidance, which resulted in a spurt of growth, for second- and third-generation British West Indians were far more at ease in Spanish. But despite this growth, it became increasingly clear that the future of the mission, in either language, was precarious. As the United Fruit Company continued to cut back its operations, more and more residents of Bananera were being forced to move away in search of employment. It became imperative that the Church begin immediately to extend its ministry to more stable Guatemalan communities.

By the end of 1963 Bishop Richards had decided to withdraw the resident priest from Bananera and move him to Lake Izabal. Thus, after December of that year weekly services were held by priests from the lake, with the able assistance of Mr. Joseph Miller, a long-time Anglican churchman. The old building moved from Virginia by the Company in 1928 was reclaimed by the latter for use as a school, but the Company replaced it with another building which it donated to the Church. The vicarage in Morales, a mile or two from Bananera, was obtained with a rental loan from the National Church and is now used by a lay reader and postulant, Enrique Lainfiesta, who works in Spanish with the young people in the Bananera/Morales area. He is also being evaluated by the diocesan Ministerial Committee as a possible candidate for Holy Orders. He works in cooperation with the priest resident in Puerto Barrios, a young Guatemalan, the Rev. Armando Guerra, also a product of the diocesan seminary, who is also responsible for the work in Bananera and the new mission in Virginia.

St. Paul's - Puerto Barrios

The first church service in Puerto Barrios was held in 1908. This congregation was served by the same priests who served St. Michael's and All Angels in Bananera until 1936, and the original church building was located near the waterfront behind the customs house.

From 1936 until 1961, this congregation was left on its own, causing a natural dispersion of members into all kinds of religious and non-religious directions. Many became members of the Lutheran Church, but most did not join any other church.

In September 1960 it was decided by Bishop Richards to branch out in two directions: 1) to the rapidly growing port city of Puerto Barrios, where already a number of church families from Bananera had taken up residence; and 2) in the opposite direction, to the very needy people living on the shores of Lake Izabal.

A layman, Mr. Alton Foster, is chiefly responsible for the reestablishment of the mission in Puerto Barrios. He, along with other laymen from Bananera, made a door-to-door survey in 1961 to discover if there would be a positive response to the Episcopal Church, followed by services in private homes in the evening, led by Mr. Foster. Later, he moved to Puerto Barrios, where he had obtained employment, and public services in English were begun late in 1961, using a private men's lodge for a chapel. These services were normally led by the priest from Bananera, and those who attended were usually elderly, English-speaking British West Indians.

When formal services began in Puerto Barrios in late 1961, the tiny congregation was visited once a month by Fr. Demery. With the arrival of Fr. Murchison in mid-1962, although resident in Bananera, he was able to devote more time to the work in the port city. Late in 1962 a centrally located frame house was purchased and remodeled by the congregation to serve as a chapel. Most of the members were English-speaking British West Indians, and all services were in English. With the withdrawal of the priest from Bananera, the mission of St. Paul's received fairly regular visits from the priests in

the Mariscos area, until January 1974, when a young Guatemalan priest, the Rev. Armando Guerra, took up residence there, with responsibility for the work in the port city, as well as Bananera, Morales, and the new mission in Virginia. The work now is directed more and more to the newer generations of West Indians, who are more comfortable using Spanish, and young ladinos, as the old-timers have either moved away or died with the passing of time.

The old frame church building has been torn down, and a new structure of concrete block and stucco, completed in 1972, now houses the chapel, a parish hall, and the rectory. This is one more addition to church-owned property in this country, enhancing the image of permanency and stability of the Episcopal Church in Guatemala.

The Development of a Rural Ministry - Project LIFE

The mission to the people of Lake Izabal was initiated entirely by the priest-in-charge of St. Michael's and All Angels, the Rev. Robert Demery. The several thousand Kekchi Indians and mestizos who lived there were starving, sick, and illiterate, and without the benefit of schools, medical care, or churches of any denomination.

With the help of a bishop from California who had visited the area, money was raised and 100 acres of strategically located land near the village of Mariscos were purchased. In June 1961, the long, slow process of clearing the dense jungle began, and the first crops of cassava, corn, and sugar cane were planted. The idea was to improve the living standard of the agricultural lake communities through technical assistance in the form of an experimental farm. Thus was born the Lake Izabal Farming and Educational (LIFE) Project. For the first time the Church had begun to take an active interest in the country and the welfare of its people.

Early in 1962 a thatched hut was built on the Church's land in the village of Mariscos and served as a temporary residence for the occasional visits of Fr. Demery from Bananera. That year, an agronomist and rubber expert arrived with his wife to take charge of the agricultural program. The first service on the lake was a baptism performed by Fr. Demery in a private home in July 1962. That same month construction was begun on the first permanent building for the lake project, a residence for the agronomist and his wife. In July 1962, Bishop Richards inaugurated a temporary palm-roofed church on the Mariscos property, and in August Fr. Demery began regular Sunday services there. By the end of that year, a part-time nurse had been employed and a temporary clinic started.

With completion of the construction of both a permanent clinic and a clergy residence in May 1963, Fr. Demery moved to Mariscos, and a full-time dispensarian was hired. At this time farm extension work and informal services of worship were started by the agronomist in the village of El Chapín, two hours by boat from Mariscos. The first services of Holy Communion were celebrated in September in El Chapín and also Campo Tres, a small village four miles by land from Mariscos. In both places, the villagers had built their own thatched-hut chapels.

One of the highlights of 1963 was the establishment of a government/Alliance for Progress rubber nursery in El Chapín of some 80,000 plants, as well as the construction of a tri-partite school (financed by the U.S. Government, the Guatemalan Government, and the people of the area) in the same village under the auspices of the Church.

As a result of continued expansion, 1964 saw many changes on the lake. In January, two one-teacher village schools were started in El Chapín and Campo Tres under the direction of Mr. Henry Buller, a lay leader from Bananera (who in 1971 was ordained to the Diaconate under a special Canon, and served as a missionary in the towns of San Felipe de Lara and Sejá until his death in October 1974), and Mr. Robert Campbell, a layman from Nicaragua. In February the cornerstone was laid for the first permanent church building in the lake area, San Estéban (St. Stephen's) at Mariscos. This church provided the setting for the Episcopal Church's first ordination service in Guatemala in May of that year, when during the first service under its roof, Fred Altman and Paul Kennedy were ordained to the Priesthood, with 22 others confirmed or received during the same service. Fr. Altman had come to replace the agronomist, who had to leave due to serious illness. In August, Fr. Demery also left to take up new work, and Bishop Richards named Frs. Altman and Kennedy co-directors of the Project.

During this year worship services were begun in three more of the lake villages: Pataxte, San Felipe de Lara, and Cocales. An average of 180 persons per Sunday attended Episcopal services on the lake that year.

Early in 1965, Mr. Silvestre Romero, a resident of Mariscos, returned from studies in the capital city to take over the direction of the school in Campo Tres. He served the LIFE Project for two years as both teacher and administrator.

In May 1965, when Fr. Kennedy left to take up work in Guatemala City, Fr. Altman became sole direct of the project.

The clinic continues to be the only source of medical care on the lake, together with a small dispensary sponsored by the Church in San Felipe de Lara, and in Mariscos an average of 1,200 cases per month are handled. The two schools have now been turned over to the government and are still functioning.

In 1969, when Eduardo Monzón returned from seminary in Puerto Rico, and after his ordination to the Diaconate, he was assigned to Mariscos to work as co-director of the project with Fr. Altman, and he was ordained to the Priesthood there a few months later. In 1970 Fr. Altman left the project for a year's sabbatical in England and Spain, after which time he was transferred to Honduras. At that time the Rev. Robert Carlson joined Fr. Monzón in Mariscos, where they worked together until the former's departure in the fall of 1973 for the Diocese of Honduras. A few months later Fr. Monzón was transferred to Guatemala City to serve as Vicar of the congregations of Santiago/St. James', and another of the graduates of the diocesan seminary, Silvestre Romero, originally from the area, was sent to Mariscos to take over the work there.

It was decided at this time to divide the work in the North, assigning Mariscos, Campo Dos, Campo Tres, and Cocales to Fr. Romero, and Puerto Barrios, Bananera/Morales, and Virginia to Fr. Armando Guerra, resident in Puerto Barrios. Thus, Silvestre has now returned to the area where he began his ministry as a teacher in the church school in Campo Tres.

The Move Westward

The arrival of the Episcopal Church in Quezaltenango was a consequence of the expansion of the Church in Guatemala, and a logical step in the plan to establish a strong national church. Work had been firmly established among nationals in Guatemala City; there was a firm base on Lake Izabal to the east; the next obvious move was to the west, where the country's second largest city is located.

In December 1963, the Rev. Manuel Val was sent to Quezaltenango to lay the groundwork for an Episcopal mission there. There was no foundation on which to build, and the city is notoriously conservative, politically and religiously. In February 1964 the first service was held in the garage of the rented home of Fr. Val. Efforts to gain acceptance were slow, and despite a valiant effort to keep the mission going, it was finally closed in 1967.

After several years' absence from this city, during which time considerable inroads were made by other Protestant churches of evangelical orientation, a new attempt is being made to minister to the people in Quezaltenango. In January 1975 the Rev. Miguel Palacios was moved there, a chapel has been established in rented space in the downtown sector, and inaugural services were held on February 9. Perhaps now -- in 1975 -- Quezaltenango is ready to receive the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Diocese of Guatemala

When Bishop Richards first visited Guatemala at the end of 1957, the Episcopal Church consisted of two small congregations of English-speaking foreigners. One priest served some 70 communicants. It is not an exaggeration to say that although the Episcopal Church was in Guatemala, in no way could it have been considered the Episcopal Church of Guatemala.

The job of changing the Church's thinking regarding its role in this country was not easy. Today, however, the Episcopal Church has grown to include one aided parish, 10 organized missions, and 4 preaching stations. There are now 1,442 baptized persons in the diocese, with 9 clergymen, including the bishop. Of these, 7 are Guatemalan; and of these, 5 are graduates of the diocesan seminary, Instituto Teológico Episcopal (ITE), which functioned from 1971 to 1973 preparing these men for the ordained ministry. This seminary was undertaken as a three-year project by Bishop Frey, with little more than hope and faith as its endowment, and the project was brought to conclusion three years later, as planned, under the episcopacy of Bishop Carral, all the while under the able direction of the Rev. David E. Bergesen.

In November 1967, a whole new life style emerged for Guatemala, when in Seattle the House of Bishops elected William Carl Frey to be the first bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Guatemala, now separated from the Diocese of Central America. Bishop Frey was consecrated in his new diocese on November 26, 1967, and a new diocesan structure was set up in Guatemala City, including the residence and offices. Bishop Frey served as Diocesan until September 1971, when he was summarily requested to leave the country by government order for having, together with other concerned religious leaders of all denominations, signed a document requesting that the government lift the state of siege that had prevailed in Guatemala for several years.

From then until his resignation in May 1972 the diocese was without a spiritual leader in residence, while Bishop Frey tried to direct the functions of the diocese by mail (censored or undelivered), telephone (usually bugged), and cassette (lost in the mail or confiscated in customs most of the time). His resignation came when it was obvious to all that this absentee leadership was impractical, ineffective, and even detrimental to the work of the Church. Permission was requested from the House of Bishops, and granted, to hold an election for bishop at the national level, a first in the short history of the diocese.

By this time Bishop Melchor Saucedo of Western Mexico had been appointed Bishop Pro Tempore, and he laid the groundwork for and chaired the special convention that provided the setting for the election that resulted in an 18-ballot stalemate after 14 hours of deliberation. The convention then voted to request the House of Bishops to elect a bishop for Guatemala in its next meeting as a body in New Orleans in the fall of 1972.

This second election was based on a list of nominees selected by a Nominating Committee appointed by the Presiding Bishop, which included three bishops and three lay members from Guatemala, and this resulted in the election of Anselmo Carral as the second bishop of Guatemala. His consecration took place in Guatemala City on January 20, 1973, when he and his family took up residence here.

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